



Nearly 90 Arabic-language students from DLI's Middle East School I and II participated in the language training exercise.

# Linguists on the Line

Story and Photos by SPC Mitch Frazier

**I**T'S a scene that is becoming commonplace throughout the world — American soldiers standing watch to promote peace through presence.

In Bosnia, Kosovo, the Middle East and even in Egypt soldiers stand on point 24 hours a day to promote peace where hostilities abound.

But what happens when the silence of peace is broken?

"Adkhulo!" The crowd shouted as it charged a 17-member guard force on the "Cahsh Vadar-Baladia."

The anger-filled voices demanded entrance into the country that lay just inches behind the guards. But according to a United Nations peace agreement, the refugees could re-enter the country only after being searched and interviewed.

The shouts continued as the guard

*Suddenly AK-47s and large wooden bats began appearing among the crowd. There was no time to waste.*

force's two military policemen and 15 linguists tried to control the mob.

"What the hell is he saying?" One of the MPs blurted to a linguist standing beside him. "We can't do anything until we figure out what they want."

Suddenly AK-47s and large wooden bats began appearing among the crowd. There was no time to waste. The refugees were angry, and now they had weapons.

"These people are armed," PFC

Nathan Allen thought as he began to translate the shouts from Arabic into English. Sweat dripped from his green-painted face as he translated for both the MPs and the refugees.

His translation was rough, but it worked. The MP could communicate with the refugee, and Allen and his teammates got a "Go" on that portion of the exercise.

Allen exhaled, then smiled.

"This is exciting," he said. "For the past year and a half we've been struggling to learn such simple things as how to describe our cars or our houses, and now we're getting a chance to work on tasks we might face in a real-world situation."

Allen was one of 88 linguists who recently left the classroom to test their language skills in a joint language training exercise at the former Fort Ord, Calif., Military Operations on Urban Terrain training site.

SPC Mitch Frazier is editor of the Defense Language Institute's *Globe* magazine.



"We're trying to bring students into a situation similar to what they might face on an actual mission," said SFC Tim Mason, chief military language instructor for Middle East School I at the Defense Language Institute at California's Presidio of Monterey.

"During a real situation like this, the students would 'run out of language,'" he said. "We're trying to force them into that situation here. It makes them rely on what they have and use it to the best of their ability."

The exercise ran mixed teams of soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines through five training lanes based on a cross section of situations they may face at their permanent duty stations.

"We have taken the Bosnia and Kosovo missions and all the situations encountered there, and built these five lanes around them," Mason said. "The only major difference is we are applying those lessons to the Middle East rather than the Balkans."

The situations that are the foundation for the joint exercise didn't come from books or historians, said SFC Kenneth Hickey, chief MLI of Middle East School II.

"The situations the students are facing come from people who have been in the field, deployed to regions very similar to this one," he said.

"We hope that by exposing students to at least a small portion of those problems here, they will be better prepared to handle them in the field," Hickey said. "That way, when

something does happen, they won't be scrambling to react for the first time. They will at least have some experience with a similar situation."

The first challenge students faced was manning the guard line between the two "warring" nations. While on the line, students were required to gain information about the two nations, while keeping the gate open and ensuring those entering were unarmed and not part of any guerrilla groups.

"This is one of the most difficult parts of the exercise," said CPT Brian Soldon, Company C's commander. "They have to keep the area secure, translating and trying to understand words they have not heard before. It can be a real eye-opener for students."

After 45 minutes on the line, each team moved to the second challenge — two-way translation.

There, students were required to hire a local truck driver to haul equipment, speak with local police about the conduct of American soldiers, and buy and barter for equipment.

"These are skills all linguists, no matter whether they are interrogators or analysts, must be able to use at some point," Hickey said.



**PFC Kate Austin speaks to classmate PFC Patricia McKimney about the translation of an audio Arabic transmission.**

After talking themselves in and out of storefronts and negotiating contracts or agreements, each team moved to the next station, sitting behind field tables, listening to audio transmissions from two "neighboring countries."

Their new task was to gather as much intelligence on both groups as possible, and Soldon said the teams met their objectives.

Next, the students gathered intelligence from interviews. At the interrogation lane, students had to rely on their ability to understand the language and be able to brief someone on what was said.

The final lane was an exercise "on the high seas," as students assisted with simulated ship interdictions.

The basic bridge-to-bridge interaction required students to not only speak to, but also translate between, the captains of two ships.

"All these lanes are designed to give substance to what we teach in the classroom," Soldon said. "And while there is a tactical reality to all of this, the focus is on practical language skills. Our goal is to expose students to what they could face, and make them better prepared for life in the field."

Soldon said that the performance of each student completing the exercise was proof enough of the success of the exercise.

"There is nothing else we could have done that would have been such a confidence booster," he said. "It was a real test of all the class work we have done." □



**Soldiers try to explain to "refugees" why they can't simply return to their homeland. The use of native clothing helped provide added realism for the exercise.**

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